# 'Disturbing' Undercover Probe Found TSA Screeners Missing Many Test Weapons



The badge and TSA logo patch are seen on the uniform of a Transportation Security Administration employee at one of the security checkpoints inside Lambert- St. Louis International Airport on October 7, 2010 in St. Louis.Jeff Roberson / AP

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**By Tom Costello and Phil Helsel**

Undercover tests have found Transportation Security Administration screeners failed to detect test weapons at a high rate, according to sources, findings that one Congressional committee chairman called "disturbing."

Members of the House Committee on Homeland Security were given details about security vulnerabilities by Department of Homeland Security's Office of Inspector General (OIG) and the TSA administrator in a classified briefing on Wednesday.

"Quite frankly, I think I speak for all of us when I say that we found that briefing disturbing," Committee Chairman Rep. Michael McCaul, R-Texas, said at a hearing following the briefing.

The rate of failure was not disclosed at the public meeting, but congressional and government sources with knowledge of the report said it was high.



## [TSA Fails Most Undercover Tests](#)

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"We take the OIG's findings very seriously and are implementing measures that will improve screening effectiveness at checkpoints," TSA Administrator David Pekoske said in a statement.

"We are focused on staying ahead of a dynamic threat to aviation with continued investment in the workforce, enhanced procedures, and new technologies," Pekoske, who was just sworn in this August, said in the statement.

The TSA said in the statement that the classified briefing was "to discuss the results of the most recent OIG covert testing at airport security checkpoints."

In 2015, the then-acting head of the TSA, Melvin Carraway, was reassigned after an internal investigation by the Department of Homeland Security found sceening failures at dozens of the nation's busiest airports.

Screeners [did not detect 95 percent of test items](#) in that investigation. The breaches allowed undercover investigators to smuggle weapons, fake explosives and other contraband through numerous checkpoints.

The briefing and committee hearing on Wednesday came nine days after a terrorist attack in New York City involving a truck left eight people dead. The suspect allegedly told investigators he was motivated by videos from the terror group Islamic State.

McCaul called America's aviation sector the "crown jewel of terrorist targets" and said, "America's enemies only have to be right once, while we have to be right 100 percent."

Pekoske told Congressional members that the agency is prototyping two CT scan systems at checkpoints right now — the devices are already used for checked bags — that could give screeners greater ability to identify suspicious substances. He said the devices would be a "significant enhancement" over devices currently used at checkpoints.



Passengers load their items into bins to be scanned as they pass through security at the Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport on December 18, 2015 in Fort Lauderdale. FileWilfredo Lee / AP

The devices have been used for checked bags but not checkpoints because they were too large and heavy for checkpoints until recently, Pekoske said. The prototype systems are in Phoenix and Boston, he said.

Pekoske said that "to invest in the CT technology requires funding above what TSA currently has," but the agency wasn't on the path to CT development at checkpoints when the budget was developed, so the program wasn't reviewed for investment.

Committee member Rep. William Keating, D-Mass., noted that $1.28 billion, being charged to the public through surcharges, is being taken away for deficit reduction.

"Certainly, additional investment would make travelers, whether they're Americans or people visiting our country, safer," Pekoske said.

Pekoske also acknowledged that poor morale at the TSA continues to be a challenge. Ranking committee member Rep. Bennie Thompson, D-Miss., said at the hearing that it "has consistently struggled with low morale across the workforce, ranking 303 out of 305 government agencies in 2016."